poetry are none other than end-rhyme and common syllabic line measure. My own impression from reading vernacular poem texts, collected in the field by linguists and others, is that deviation from an apparent norm is more often found (and thus, presumably, more readily tolerated) in meter than in rhyme—precisely the situation with Dundes' texts.

In one respect Dundes' study is unfortunately deficient: he does not give adequate information regarding the source, or, broadly speaking, the "context" of his material. Thus, it is not clear to what extent the repartees are spontaneous, and to what extent well-known, "standard" replies. In one place he speaks of the "traditional retort" (p. 329), and in another he writes that "these traditions are well-established" (p. 341). One suspects that the four-line retort on page 334, for example, in which there is completely uniform line length, is "traditional," and not impromptu.[3] Thus, the formulation of a dueling response may be less a matter of imagination than of memory. At the same time Dundes gives the distinct impression that free, unlearned response is neither infrequent or unappreciated. Be that as it may, the published dueling texts show a distinct tendency to conform to the principal criteria of Turkish folk poetry.

(2) Dundes' material provides ample evidence for the view that the object of the verbal attacker is "to force one's opponent into a female, passive role" (p. 326). In this connection it is interesting to note that when describing the types of entertainments which Ottoman sultans encouraged at their court, Turkish historical sources mention, along with clowns, buffoons, mimics, and the like, persons who can only be described as "verbal duelers." The "fall guy," opening a verbal exchange, was said to utter a "key," also called a "female word" *(dişi söz)*. The respondent, taking advantage of this suggestion, would reply with a "male word" *(erkek söz)*.[4] Although the published sources give no examples, the general tenor of these amusements, presumably carried out in exclusively male company, is not difficult to imagine. Even in the absence of historical dueling texts themselves, it is clear that the contemporary practice described so vividly by Dundes has an impressive and ancient tradition behind it.

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[3] While Dundes notes the presence, in this retort and elsewhere, of an *a.a.b.a.* rhyme scheme, he does not point out that this is standard for much of Turkish strophic poetry. The four-line retort he quotes, with uniform seven syllable line length (again assuming a two syllable proper noun in the final line) is thus a perfect example of the Turkish verse form called *mani*.

[4] See Cavdet Kudret, *Ortaoyunu* (Istanbul: Türkiye Is Bankası Kültür Yay., 1973, 128), 12.

Alligators-In-The-Sewers: A Journalistic Origin

The story of alligators haunting the sewers of major American cities is a modern urban legend. But what of its origin? Thomas Pynchon has written:

Did he remember the baby alligators? Last year, or maybe the year before, kids all over Nueva York bought these little alligators for pets. Macy's was selling them for fifty cents; every child, it seemed, had

to have one. But soon the children grew bored with them. Some set them loose in the streets, but most flushed them down the toilets. And these had grown and reproduced, had fed off rats and sewage, so that now they moved big, blind, albino, all over the sewer system. Down there, God knew how many there were. Some had turned cannibal because in their neighborhood the rats had all been eaten, or had fled in terror.[1]

With those words, Pynchon propelled the persistent rumors of alligators in the sewers of New York City into a major work of fiction. Pynchon's retelling of this folktale is at once concise, complete, and elaborate. He envisioned an Alligator Patrol going into the depths of the sewers, working in teams of two, with one man holding a flashlight while the other carried a twelve-gauge repeating shotgun. Pynchon's fascinating novel wove the fabric of the alligators-in-the-sewers motif throughout the pages of his book, and thus brought this tale into modern popular culture as no one before him had.

Folklorists to herpetologists have acknowledged the widespread distribution of this peculiar alligators-in-the-sewers story, but many researchers have been vague as to the origins of the tale. Without giving a citation, Richard M. Dorson noted marijuana harvesters, in pursuit of the elusive strain "New York White," had difficulties

because, according to a newspaper story, full-grown alligators prowled the sewers of New York. It seems that Miami vacationers returning to New York in the winter brought back baby alligators as pets for their children. The more the alligators grew the less ideal they appeared as playmates, and their owners, too tenderhearted to skin them for their hides, mercifully flushed them down the toilet. Some survived in their new environment and confronted sewer maintenance workers, who publicly protested at this unnecessary additional hazard to their occupation. The newspapers published the matter, and the tales began to circulate.[2]

In Jack Horn's 1975 review of *Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire,* the "blind white alligators that live in New York sewers" are mentioned as an example of urban folklore, but Horn's "source" of the tale does not go further than the Florida souvenir and the flushing toilet.[3]

In the world of zoology, we find the same meanderings, for the herpetologists Sherman and Madge Rutherford Minton have written:

One of the sillier folktales of the late 1960s was that the New York sewers were becoming infested with alligators, presumably unwanted pets that had been flushed down the toilet. In some accounts, these were growing to formidable size from feeding on rats. We have been unsuccessful in tracing the source of these legends but would assure New Yorkers that alligators are not among their urban problems.[4]

[1] Thomas Pynchon, *V.* (New York: Bantam Books, 1964), p. 33.

[2] Richard M. Dorson, *America in Legend: Folklore from the Colonial Period to the Present* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973), pp. 291–292.

[3] Jack Horn, "White Alligators and Republican Cousins—The Stuff of Urban Folklore," *Psychology Today,* November 1975, pp. 126, 130.

[4] Sherman A. and Madge Rutherford Minton, *Giant Reptiles,* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1973), p. 34.

My search, therefore, was for an apparently "real" account of an alligator in a sewer—a journalistic vehicle—as the possible origin of the tale. As I have written elsewhere

> crocodilians fall from the sky, and materialize inside cotton bins and in washrooms from Texas to France. They slither and slink to the horror of humans from basement drains and sewers anywhere from Kansas to New York City. Unlike some mystery animals,[5] alligators are caught, killed, and placed in museums. Although actual alligators seem to appear and persist in northern winters (e.g., sightings and finds for Oakland County, Michigan, 1953–1957) to the dismay of herpetologists, random out-of-place finds seem to be the rule.[6]

Some of these alleged discoveries are unusual, as, for example, the "alligator five and a half feet long . . . found near the bank of the Rock river, at Janesville, Wis., frozen to death," in 1892.[7]

I have compiled a list[8] of seventy-plus encounters with erratic alligators for the years 1843–1973, but the actual, supposedly true recording of an alligator in a sewer proved to be a rare occurrence. I was able to discover just such an event, nevertheless, recorded as fact from, not surprisingly, New York City.

The incident may or may not have taken place, but its publication in a no nonsense fashion in a highly regarded and respected newspaper must have lent much credibility to the story. In contrast to the common notion that the alligators-in-the-sewers motif is a product of the sixties, the following article is from the *New York Times* of February 10th, 1935, and is given here in its entirety:

ALLIGATOR FOUND IN UPTOWN SEWER

Youths Shoveling Snow Into Manhole See The Animal Churning In Icy Water.

SNARE IT AND DRAG IT OUT

Reptile Slain by Rescuers When It Gets Vicious—Whence It Came is Mystery.

The youthful residents of East 123rd Street, near the murky Harlem River, were having a rather grand time at dusk yesterday shoveling the last of the recent snow into a gaping manhole.

Salvatore Condulucci, 16 years old, of 419 East 123rd Street, was assigned to the rim. His comrades would heap blackened slush near him, and he, carefully observing the sewer's capacity, would give the last fine flick to each mound.

Suddenly there were signs of clogging ten feet below, where the manhole drop merged with the dark conduit leading to the river. Salvatore yelled: "Hey, you guys, wait a minute," and got down on his knees to see what was the trouble.

What he saw, in the thickening dusk, almost caused him to topple into the icy cavern. For the jagged

[5] Here I am attempting to make a distinction between such "mystery animals" as Bigfoot, Thunderbirds, Lake Monsters, and so forth and captured, out-of-place animals. See Jerome Clark and Loren Coleman, *Creatures of the Outer Edge* (New York, Warner Books, 1978), for more complete insights into "mystery animals."

[6] Loren Coleman, "Erratic Crocodilians and Other Things," *The Info Journal*, 3, No. 4 (February, 1974), 12.

[7] "News Briefly Stated," *Chicago Citizen*, February 27, 1892, p. 3; from Larry A. Viskochil, personal communication, March 24, 1971.

[8] Coleman, 1974, pp. 13–18.

surface of the ice blockade below was moving; and something black was breaking through. Salvatore's eyes widened; then he managed to leap to his feet and call his friends.

"Honest, it's an alligator!" he exploded.

Others Look and Are Convinced.

There was a murmur of skepticism. Jimmy Mireno, 19, of 440 East 123rd Street, shouldered his way to the rim and stared.

"He's right," he said.

Frank Lonzo, 18, of 1743 Park Avenue, looked next. He also confirmed the spectre. Then there was a great crush about the opening in the middle of the street and heads were bent low around the aperture.

The animal apparently was threshing about in the ice, trying to get clear. When the first wave of awe had passed, the boys decided to help it out. A delegation was dispatched to the Lehigh Stove and Repair Shop at 441 East 123rd Street.

"We want some clothes-line," demanded the delegation, and got it.

Young Condolucci, an expert on Western movies, fashioned a slip knot. With the others watching breathlessly, he dangled the noose into the sewer, and after several tantalizing near-catches, looped it about the 'gator's neck. Then he pulled hard. There was a grating of rough leathery skin against jumbled ice. But the job was too much for one youth. The others grabbed the rope and all pulled.

Slowly, with its curving tail twisting weakly, the animal was dragged from the snow, ten feet through the dark cavern, and to the street, where it lay, non-committal; it was not in Florida, that was clear.

And therefore, when one of the boys sought to loosen the rope, the creature opened its jaws and snapped, not with the robust vigor of a healthy, well-sunned alligator, but with the fury of a sick, very badly treated one. The boys jumped back. Curiosity and sympathy turned to enmity.

"Let'im have it!" the cry went up.

Rescuers Then Kill It.

So the shovels that had been used to pile snow on the alligator's head were now to rain upon it. The 'gator's tail swished about a few last times. Its jaws clashed weakly. But it was in no mood for a real struggle after its icy incarceration. It died on the spot.

Triumphantly, but not without the inevitable reaction of sorrow, the boys took their victim to the Lehigh Stove and Repair Shop. There it was found to weigh 125 pounds; they said it measured seven and a half or eight feet. It became at once the greatest attraction the store ever had had. The whole neighborhood milled about, and finally, a call for the police reached a nearby station.

But there was little for the hurrying policemen to do. The strange visitor was quite dead; and no charge could be preferred against it or against its slayers. The neighbors were calmed with little trouble and speculation as to where the 'gator had come from was rife.

There are no pet shops in the vicinity; that theory was ruled out almost at once. Finally, the theories simmered down to that of a passing boat. Plainly, a steamer from the mysterious Everglades, or thereabouts, had been passing 123rd Street, and the alligator had fallen overboard.

Shunning the hatefully cold water, it had swum toward shore and found only the entrance to the conduit. Then after another 150 yards through a torrent of melting snow—and by that time it was half dead—it had arrived under the open manhole.

Half-dead, yes, the neighborhood conceded. But still alive enough for a last splendid opening and snapping of its jaws. The boys were ready to swear to that.

At about 9 p.m., when tired mothers had succeeded in getting most of their alligator-conscious youngsters to bed, a Department of Sanitation truck rumbled up to the store and made off with the prize. Its destination was Barren Island and an incinerator.

The article makes exciting reading and probably had people of its day talking about alligators-in-the-sewers for some time. Indeed, the reported encounter may have, for years, spawned similar reports from New Yorkers and other readers of the paper. As far as this writer can establish, this account is the first documented source of this particular motif.

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